



## **Cape Verdean Independence Day Festival: The food is part of the heritage**

**There were pots of cachupa, skewers of grilled pork, mangoes, raw sugar cane and pastel de peixe.**

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**BY TOM MOONEY**  
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PROVIDENCE -- Edward DeGrace, of Allentown, Pa., and Serena Mann, of Laurel, Md., embraced in the cool shade beneath the maples of India Point Park yesterday and savored their Cape Verdean heritage on display all around them.



Journal photo / Kathy Borchers

Cooking pork shish kebabs on a grill at yesterday's Cape Verdean Independence Day Festival, in Providence, are Ana Andrade, of Brockton, Mass., and Maria Lomba, of Pawtucket.

Pots of cachupa -- the national dish made from pork, corn, kale and beans -- steamed from virtually every other awning lining the riverfront. Vendors sold jewelry and mangoes. They sold raw sugar cane and T-shirts emblazoned with the individual names of the 15 islands that make up the Atlantic archipelago nation.

The velvety voice of Cesaria Evora, the godmother of Cape Verdean samba, slipped through loudspeakers and across the strolling crowd -- all of whom, like DeGrace and

Mann, had come to the annual Cape Verdean Independence Day Festival to celebrate their culture and identity.

"This is infinitely important to Cape Verdean heritage," said DeGrace, 52, who left Cape Verde when he was 5 but whose cultural pride drew him six hours north for the weekend festival.

"Cape Verdeans belong to every ethnic group," said DeGrace, "but they don't identify themselves with anyone else but themselves."

Cape Verde, which is slightly larger than Rhode Island in area, sits about 300 miles off the coast of West Africa. A dry land and a poor country, it is home to about 415,000 people.

For five centuries, Cape Verde fell under Portuguese colonial rule and was used as a penal colony, as well as by slave traders.

The country won independence 30 years ago, on July 5, 1975, a date celebrated annually by Cape Verdeans, particularly in New England.

Local Cape Verdeans have placed the New England population somewhere between 50,000 and 70,000. According to the 2000 Census, four out of every five Cape Verdean descendants in the United States live in Rhode Island or Massachusetts.

"We have always been here," said Isadore Ramos, a former assistant school superintendent in East Providence. But their cultural identity, he said, was often lost on others.

Cindy Hughes and Trish Schulz, both of Virginia, found themselves learning much about Cape Verde and its culture as they strolled past the vending tables.

"We knew nothing about it," said Hughes, whose tap dance studio has 30 students competing in a national competition in Providence this week. "But since we've been here, we've learned it is this tiny island that got its independence about 30 years ago from Portugal."

Such impromptu education is one reason why Monique Watson, 24, of Providence and of Cape Verdean descent, says she enjoys coming to the festival every year.

"I love the fact that everyone comes down, from different backgrounds, and there is this chance to experience something new and to interact with different people."

Stephanie Ramos' appearance at the festival exemplified the strong bond that Cape Verdean descendants have for their homeland across the ocean.

Ramos is one of five members of Cape Verdeans United, a nonprofit group based in Providence that hopes to raise enough money to erect a playground on each of the inhabited islands of Cape Verde.

For the fourth consecutive year, Ramos was selling cachupa and pastel de peixe, a pastry stuffed with tuna, in hopes of raising more money for "Project Sandbox."

"The kids in Cape Verde are poor and have to rely on a lot of creativity for their fun," she said. "We believe children can grow strong through play as well as education."

Days like yesterday, said Manny Lomba, formerly of Pawtucket and who now serves in the Coast Guard in Maryland, serve an important, if subtle, function.

"It gives Cape Verdeans a chance to see who we are and to steer our own way in the world."

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